



Paul Janensch: Trump's big speech gets fact-checked

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Major news outlets and news-oriented research organizations fact checked President Donald Trump's State of the Union address. They found some of his claims to be false, exaggerated or misleading and some to be true.

Let's look at a sampling of statements he made Jan. 30 in a televised speech to a joint session of Congress. They are in boldface type, accompanied by the conclusions of respected fact checkers — not, I emphasize, partisan tweeters.

“After years and years of wage stagnation, we are finally seeing rising wages.”

The Associated Press, the world's largest news provider, posted this fact check on its website:

“Actually, they are not rising any faster than they have before. Average hourly pay rose 2.5 percent in 2017, slightly slower than the 2.9 percent increase recorded in 2016.”

Trump said several times that the U.S. must limit the admission of legal immigrants for the sake of national security.

“Most tragically, they have caused the loss of many American lives.”

In its fact check, USA Today said several studies, including a report from the libertarian Cato Institute, “found the incarceration rate for native-born Americans is 1.53 percent compared to 0.85% for undocumented immigrants and 0.47 percent for legal immigrants.”

“Many car companies are now building and expanding plants in the United States — something we have not seen for decades.”

In The New York Times fact-checking report by several staff members, reporter Jim Tankersley called this claim “an exaggeration.”

He said the building and expansion of auto plants has been going on for years. “Toyota, for example, opened a plant in Mississippi in 2011,” he wrote.

“There has been no surge in automotive employment under his tenure — it's actually down from a year ago,” said Tankersley.

“I'm proud to report that the coalition to defeat ISIS has liberated very close to 100% of the territory just recently held by these killers in Iraq and in Syria.”

CNN rated that statement as true.

“The terror group was expelled from their self-proclaimed capital in Raqqa, Syria, as well as its onetime stronghold in Mosul, Iraq,” said the cable news channel’s fact-checking report.

Some news outlets also fact checked the reactions of prominent Democrats to the Republican president’s speech.

U.S. Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy III, grandson of Robert F. Kennedy, said in the Democratic Party’s official response:

“Top CEOs making 300 times the average worker is not right.”

A fact-checking report by The Washington Post said the 300-1 ratio was published in 2014 by the liberal Economic Policy Institute. It added that research by The Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg News “show that the ratio between what top CEOs and their workers make is closer to 200 to 1.”

Kennedy referred to “top CEOs.” If I were fact checking Kennedy’s response, I would find what the compensation ratio is when all CEOs are included.

Do facts matter? Maybe not to those who believe only what they want to believe. But to conscientious voters, I think facts do matter.